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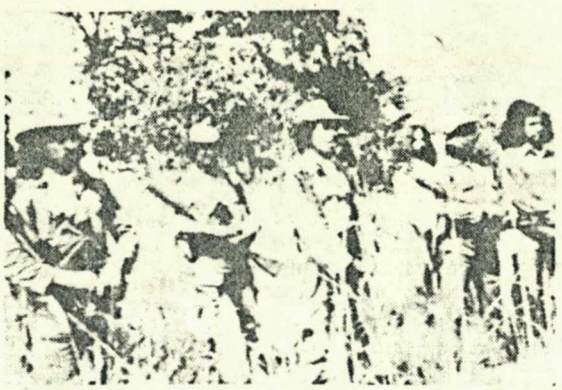
East Timor: Extermination of a People in a Diplomatic Deadlock

by Elsie Smiles



Fretilin forces struggle on, desperate for international assistance.

*In early March this year, Jose Ramos Horta, the Fretilin representative to the United Nations (with observer status), visited Japan and spoke with an AMPO representative. Based, in part, on those discussions, the following presents an update on the protracted, bitter struggle of the East Timorese.**

Ten years have now passed since the Indonesian Armed Forces invaded and annexed the former Portuguese territory of East Timor, acquiring its 27th province, another minority population and another area of conflict. In that time, 200,000 - 300,000 Timorese, nearly one third of the pre-invasion population, have died either directly from the war or from starvation and disease. As the murder, torture, rape and imprisonment continues, the war can only be described as one of attempted genocide. 20,000 Indonesian soldiers have also died.

The resistance movement has been described by the Indonesian command as "a handful of bandits," "a spent force," "a gang of criminal remnants." Under the conditions of one of the world's tightest blockades, entry to the territory is strictly controlled, yet information smuggled out from the Frente Revolucionaria de Timor-Leste Independente (Fretilin) command or reports from East Timorese refugees, mainly in Portugal and Australia of the persistence and strength of the nationalist insurgency belie the Indonesian claims of pacification and control. Almost ten years of armed struggle for independance, of victories and defeats, forms the backdrop of the current situation.

Lead-up to the Invasion

East Timor's struggle for self-determination was given a boost by the overthrow of the Salazar regime in Portugal in April 1974. The subsequent lifting of political repression in the colony saw the emergence of several new political parties. The Uniao Democratica Timorense (UDT), set up in place of the official party of the fascist regime, was supported by the colony's small elite. Its stance was to change from advocating a continuation of some form of Portuguese control to a desire for independence. Apodeti, a party that strongly advocated integration with Indonesia, had no real strength in East Timor, but was actively promoted by the Indonesian authorities. Fretilin, formed in 1974 and inspired by the revolutionary nationalism of African leaders in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, was comprised of previously clandestine groups that demanded complete independence, free from any special relationship with either Portugal or Indonesia.

Early in 1975 the UDT formed a coalition with Fretilin to pressure the Portuguese for a smooth

* Additional information on the current situation is available in TAPOL, a bi-monthly journal published by the British Campaign for the Defense of Political Prisoners and Human Rights in Indonesia, and in *The War Against East Timor* by Carmel Budiardjo and Liem Soei Liong, published by Zed Books in 1984.

process of self-determination, but Portugal, on the verge of revolution at home and in its larger African colonies, was giving little attention to East Timor. The Indonesians would only stand for independence if Fretilin was destroyed, and consequently persuaded the UDT to launch a coup in Dili. Yet Fretilin's widespread support throughout the country, including Timorese troops from the Portuguese colonial army, led it, after fierce resistance resulting in the loss of 2,000 lives, to triumph. The Portuguese authorities, in the tradition of crumbling colonial bureaucracies, fled. Fretilin demanded complete decolonization and, when the Portuguese didn't return, assumed de facto control in September 1975. Independence was declared on 28 November of that year.

In December, the Indonesians invaded Dili and began a massacre which mounted to 60,000 people before February. The massive Indonesian invasion had been in the planning stages since the Lisbon coup in April '74, yet it had to work fast under the guise of restoring order, and not be seen as invading an independent country. Suharto had waited until December to feel out international opinion and to guarantee an assured supply of weapons. On July 17th, 1976, President Suharto signed the Bill of Integration, claiming the support of an East Timor People's Assembly, comprised of local rulers summoned by the military and who, in fact, represented no one. A puppet government was formed by the UDT, Apodeti and two other non-entities chosen to make the parties seem more numerous and representative. The government proclaimed "integrasi" and adopted Indonesian style democracy with a "representative system by means of consensus and consent." Unlike any other region of Indonesia, the East Timor administration is not run by the Department of Home Affairs but by the Department of Defense and Security. In 1978, a Special Coordinating Committee for the administration of East Timor was set up under General Benny Murdani, present Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. All leading positions in East Timor's government are occupied by the military, and most Indonesians working in East Timor are in uniform. Any Timorese must go through a thorough screening to get a work permit, travel pass, ID card, or even marriage license. They must fill in a questionnaire about their background and political attitudes, and account for their actions at the time of the invasion.

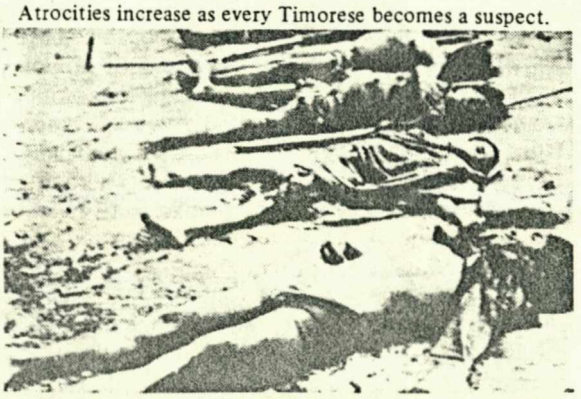
The Indonesian authorities have embarked on an intense "Indonesianization campaign" particularly among the younger generation. It set up more schools in five years than the Portuguese did in a hundred. 'Bahasa Indonesia' is the sole language allowed in schools and students suffer a relentless indoctrination of the Pancasila, Indonesia's state dogma. The curriculum is completely devoid of information about East Timor. There is strong emphasis on physical education and on membership of the Pramuka, the state-controlled scout movement that emphasizes parading, marching, saluting the flag and singing nationalist Indonesian songs. When visitors come, children are forced to exhibit their enthusiasm for the new Indonesian culture. This indoctrination has proved counterproductive in many ways. Refugees report that it has become a common joke that Indonesia's five principles would be better defined as "Ask, borrow, take, grab and, in any case, everything belongs to the Indonesians." The military present an elaborately orchestrated cabaret for diplomatic or press visitors. Such performances of traditional dance, which under normal conditions are banned, are often held under discrete gunpoint.

Onslaught of the New Order

In 1976 Fretilin adopted a strategy of short sharp attacks on Indonesian troops. By September 1977, Fretilin was nearly destroyed as attacks escalated and massive numbers of Indonesian troops moved in. The campaign of encirclement and annihilation against the liberated areas in the south border region had begun. Indonesian offensives forced the population out of the mountains and into Indonesian-controlled territory. The resulting destruction of the Timorese agricultural system has caused the most deaths.

Before the invasion, people lived in hamlets of five or six houses, principally cultivating corn and tubers. Coffee was the major source of cash income. Land was generally managed by shifting cultivation, with rice terraces cooperatively worked by kin groups. All traditional village life has now stopped. Concentration camps have been set up in infertile areas. These camps allow the Indonesian army to control the population and, as an Indonesian parliamentarian stated, "to separate

Atrocities increase as every Timorese becomes a suspect.



the people from the terrorists." People are not allowed to leave their villages to tend their agricultural land scattered about the area. This has resulted in a massive famine.

After destroying one third of the population in ten years, the Indonesian military administration is now conducting a programme to 'prevent an increase in the population of the province'. It claims that 20,000 women are already practising birth control out of a total target population of 95,000 – nearly the entire population of women of childbearing age. Many women have been sterilized unknowingly when under anesthetic for other treatment. Deprovera – a drug with an international reputation for its harmful effects – is being widely used. Meanwhile immigrants from Indonesia, projected to double in the next four years, will gradually become a majority.

Amnesty International has compiled a dossier of disappearances since the late 1970s, based on information from refugees and letters from East Timor. In 1983 they drew international attention to an Indonesian manual concerning torture procedures for interrogation. The Indonesian government denies the charges and claims the document is a forgery.

The Red Cross began its relief services in 1979. From April '82 to July '83 it was forced to leave because of the preparations for the '83 offensive. In May 1982 some ICRC programmes were taken over by UNICEF, but these were suspended in mid '83. The Indonesians claim that UNICEF is still operating but, in fact, its program is being handled by the Indonesian Red Cross, headed by a Brigadier General, and its main activity is teaching Indonesian. The ICRC is now only allowed to operate on Atauro island which is used to house 2,000 prisoners under deplorable conditions, with hundreds dying of malrutrition or disease. Prisoners are frequently tortured in the most brutal fashion.

During the Indonesian offensive from September, '78 to March '79, four-fifths of Fretilin's Supreme Command was killed, leaving only three members of the Central Committee alive, all in the Eastern zone. 80 percent of their troops had been lost and 90 percent of their weapons. All support bases were destroyed and the Indonesian troops now had the bulk of the population under its control. Lines of communication between remaining resistance fighters had been severed. There was also a drastic split in the Fretilin ranks. In 1977, the President, Amoral, was removed because of his to compromise with the Indonesians. In 1978, Fretilin's Minister for Information and Security, the man responsible for Radio Maubere, Fretilin's invaluable contact with the outside world, surrendered to the Indonesians, supplying them with the information that led to the capture of many leaders. He was exiled to a neighbouring island, but all the others who surrendered with him were executed. Those surrendering to date have been dealt with in the same way – torture followed by execution. Fretilin can harbour no illusions about compromise or surrender.

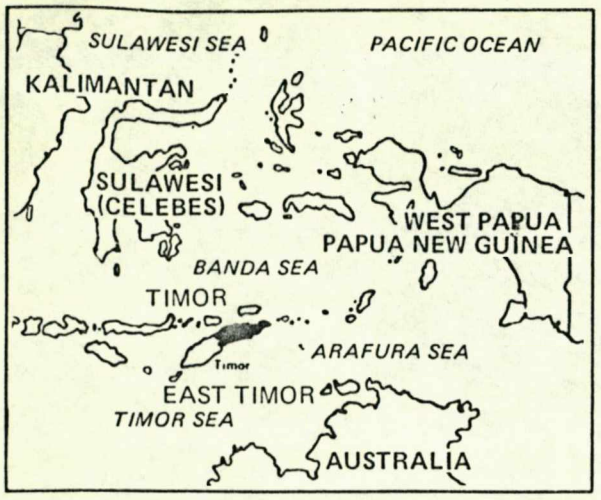
Resurgent Resistance

Fretilin leadership now remains only in the East, led by Xanana Gusmao. There has been a shift in tactics away from the defense of liberated areas (attacks upon which simply could no longer be resisted) to small mobile units that simultaneously attack different regions to distract and disperse the enemy. At the Fretilin Congress of March 1981, it was decided to launch a major drive to develop the strategy of a prolonged people's war using guerrilla tactics and a network of support based on an underground political structure.

At the national level the resistance is now led by the Revolutionary Council of National Resistance (CRRN) which includes members of the Fretilin Central Committee, commanders of the Falantil units and representatives of people living in the Indonesian-controlled concentration camps and population centres. Below the CRRN there are Regional Committees for the Resistance at the district level and Centres of National Resistance at the sub-district level. People in the camps and in towns are involved in resistance activites from information gathering to supplying guerrillas with clothing, medicines and equipment unobtainable in the bush. Xanana told the UN General Assembly in 1982 that because the support bases had been transferred from the mountains to the villages, "to exterminate Fretilin it is first necessary to exterminate the Maubere people."

Great efforts are also being made to persuade those Timorese recruited by the Indonesians during the famine of 1979 to come back and join

"The problem of starvation is as bad as Biafra. and potentially as serious as Kampuchea" Head of Red Cross relief operations.



Fretilin forces. When Indonesian soldiers are captured, they are given education on the Timor cause and then set free, in the hope it will have some effect on fellow soldiers.

In August '81, the third major offensive by Indonesia focused on the Timor strongholds in the East, attacking from air and sea. It has included a scorched earth policy which has destroyed many food production areas. In fighting a highly motivated people on their own rugged terrain, the Indonesians are resorting to methods that cause indiscriminate damage. "Operation Security" aimed to drive all Fretilin guerrillas and their families into the central sector where they could be rounded up and exterminated. Tens of thousands of local Timorese boys were forcefully recruited and pushed, unarmed, into the front lines to search our the armed resistance in the mountains. This strategy failed as the Timorese would often warn the guerrillas and allow them through the encirclement ring. While intensifing the people's hatred for the Indonesians, the greatest casualty of Operation Security was the corn and rice harvest which, with so much of the labor scattered through the bush, could not be planted before the rainy season in September. Yet this campaign convinced Fretilin that it could not continue the strategy of holding base areas and waging semi-positional warfare.

In 1982, Fretilin launched counter attacks across the country. With the morale of Indonesian troops at an all-time low, they inflicted heavy losses and forced the Indonesians to agree to a ceasefire. The military promised amnesty, but Fretilin knew too well the fate of those who surrender. Talks between Xanana and Colonel Purwanto, the Indonesian military commander, were held in a neutral area in the eastern sector in March '83.

Xanana's insistence to talk with the military commander and not the puppet governor was somewhat embarassing for the Indonesians who were still insisting that Fretilin was a powerless resistance force.

The Indonesians appealed to their sense of brotherhood. This tactic had been used in revolts within Indonesia and to gain support of the Indonesian people for confrontations with Malaysia or West Irian. But East Timor was never part of an integrated state, never ruled by the Dutch and never claimed by Indonesia, and cannot be considered a regional revolt. Indonesian nationalism does not wash with the Timorese. Nor would such a nationalistic appeal be reason enough for the Indonesian people to support the atrocities or the deaths of their own people. Thus information about East Timor is hidden from the Indonesian people. Within Indonesia there is no mention of the Army's activities in East Timor, and military aspects of integration of East Timor into Indonesia remain undocumented.

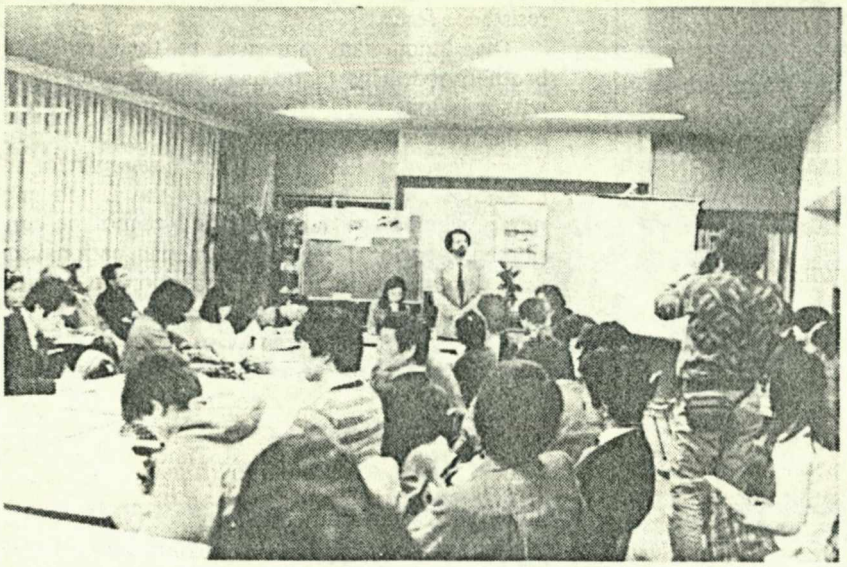
In September '83 another Indonesian offensive began, as 20,000 troops broke the ceasefire, on the excuse that Fretilin had killed some concentration camp guards. Under "Operation Clean-Sweep," hundreds of suspected sympathizers were killed. In November and December, Xanana reported intense and indiscriminate air bombardment against civilian and economic tarets, even on Indonesian settlement camps where inhabitants were suspected sympathizers of Fretilin. A-4 Skyhawks, a mainstay of U.S. arsenal in the Indo-China war are now being deployed.

Fretilin reports that it successfully resisted the large scale Indonesian offensive in 1984 in the eastern third of the country. It estimates that 17,000 Indonesian troops still remain there out of a total of 40,000 in the territory as a whole.

To facilitate the popular resurgence in 1984, Fretilin changed their conception of being the sole representatives of the East Timorese people. They now welcome a multi-party system with many interest groups, including the UDT. As a Fretilin commander explains, "within this framework, Fretilin is making appeals to all Timorese nationalists, both inside East Timor and in the outside world, for national unity."

Fretilin claims its forces now number more than 8,000, and have extended operations into new areas, particularly along the nothern part of the border with West Timor. This has forced the Indonesians to relocate their troops who are already having problems with their heavy equipment getting bogged down in the mud of the rainy season.

The military is now calling upon its most savage soldiers to cope with the guerrilla war. The red beret paracommando troops, the elite Kopassandha corps, are now being employed as the basic fighting force, whereas in the past they were only used in special operations. Ruthless-



Fretilin representative Jose Ramos Horta addresses Japanese activists in Tokyo. Horta also spoke to groups in Osaka and Hiroshima before he left for a speech tour to Australia and Europe.

ness is the qualification for promotion. Key positions in the Indonesian military are all filled by East Timor veterans. General Murdani has been in East Timor from the start. Yet, he, with the failure of this recent offensive, faces growing opposition from ranks of the military in Jakarta who question the effectiveness of his big stick policy.

The Church and the Faithful

As no outsider can enter the territory to monitor the occupation, the Catholic Church has proven an invaluable source of information from the inside. With the sudden disintegration of the colonialist system, the Church found itself alone. It ceased to be part of the Portuguese Church and did not become part of the Indonesian Church. It is now administered directly from Rome. Nearly 50 percent of East Timorese are Catholic, and it came as somewhat of a shock when their educators and mentors – 90 percent of priests and nuns, many Timorese – fled to Portugal at the time of the invasion. Those remaining are Timorese who strongly reject political and ecclesiastical integration with Indonesia.

Ribero, the Bishop at the time of the invasion retired in 1977, distraught by the destruction of the Church and the country. His replacement, Mgr Lopes, was only appointed Apostolic Administrator, reflecting the Vatican's uneasiness about the situation. Mgr. Lopes is of the same generation as the Fretilin leaders. His feelings are very nationalist, and he refers to the church of East Timor as the 'Maubere Church.' He was carefully silent until Operation Security in 1981, and then he began to speak out. The attitude of the Indonesian military is one of resentment of the Church's moral authority and organizational strength. Yet they recognize that the Church can be a very valuable vehicle of propaganda. Mgr. Lopes was requested by the Commander in Chief of the IAF to publically support 'integrasi'. He refused and took the opportunity to complain about the atrocities being committed against his people. The church has consistantly refused to call upon the Fretilin guerrillas to lay down their arms given that, in the past, guerrillas who surrendered were executed. The Indonesians wanted to replace Portuguese with Indonesian as the language used at Mass. He again refused.

In March 1983, under Murdani's pressure, the Vatican forced Lopes to resign. The man to replace him, Mgr. Belo, has proved even more outspoken, despite the fact that he is Indonesian and new to Timor. Two months after the October offensive, he delivered a sermon strongly critisising the actions of the Indonesian military. He even received a letter of solidarity from the Indonesian Bishops Conference who had previously refused to take a stand on East Timor. In July '84 the Pope made a statement asking that the rights of individuals be respected and the ethnic, cultural and religious identity of the people be considered. He called for complete access to humanitarian aid.

Church groups are working on an international scale in support of East Timor. The Catholic Institute of International Relations organized a meeting in London in January this year of organizations from nine European countries. They compiled a declaration on East Timor to be sent to selected members of national parliaments and of the European Parliament. Meanwhile, however, the Indonesian Council of Churches remains an

energetic mouthpiece of the Indonesian regime, collaborating to suppress the news of the tragedy of East Timor within Indonesia itself.

International Response and the United Nations

Both the invasion and the methods of armed conflict are contrary to international law. In December 1975 the UN General Assembly voted 72-10 with 43 abstentions for an Indonesian withdrawal from East Timor, and the Security Council supported this measure unanimously. The General Assembly has adopted resolutions supporting self-determination every year. Yet this sentiment has gradually wained. In 1982 the vote squeaked past, 50-46 with 50 abstentions. In August 1983 the UN Secretary General announced that, for reasons undefined, East Timor would not be raised at the 38th Session of the General Assembly. Since then, Indonesia has accelerated its campaign throughout Africa and the Pacific, offering economic rewards for UN support.

Japan, Indonesia's main trading partner, has lobbied hard for Indonesia. Horta commented, "We will not ask Japan to impose economic sanctions on Indonesia – that is unthinkable. From the Japanese government, which claims to be neutral on all international issues, all we ask is that they go and sit in a coffee shop during the UN sessions and remain neutral on East Timor. But in the General Assembly Japanese delegates are lobbying almost as actively as Indonesia to convince countries to stop voting for East Timor."

The USA and Australia acknowledge that no act of self-determination has taken place but, through political and economic interests, support 'integrasi.' Indeed, they are known to have had prior knowledge of the invasion and to have condoned it. In negotiations with the Indonesians over exploitation of oil reserves in the 'Timor Gap,' Australia implicitly recognizes Indonesian claims over the territory. West European governments on the whole abstain, not accepting 'integrasi' but not wanting to upset Indonesia.

The Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia (IGGI), whose members include Japan, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and almost all the Western Europe Governments, has met annually since 1967 to coordinate economic support for the military regime. IGGI's decisions have remained totally unaffected by Indonesia's invasion of East Timor and aid and investment continues to increase. Military support comes mainly from the USA, Australia, the Netherlands, Britain, West Germany, France and Sweden. Governments with financial ties with Indonesia have potential leverage but choose not to use it.

The 1982 UN resolution had called for "Consultations with all parties directly concerned" to attempt a settlement of the problem. Secret negotiations between Portugal and Indonesia began in November 1984. The decision to hold them, apparently the reason for keeping East Timor off the agenda of the General Assembly for two years, will probably allow the issue to be dropped entirely. The negotiations between "all parties directly concerned" seems to assume that the people of East Timor are not "directly concerned" in their survival or future. Australia is helping to persuade Portugal not to recognize Fretilin as representative of the East Timorese. Portugal is also under pressure from the EEC, which it has recently joined, because of the EEC's strong interests in economic ties with Indonesia.

By going ahead with these negotiations Indonesia has already compromised its stand that East Timor is an "internal affair" of Indonesia and conceded that Portugal does not need to recognize East Timor as an Indonesian province. In return it has been guaranteed that self-determination will not be discussed and the talks confined to "human rights and humanitarian affairs."

One arrangement that many fear the two parties may come to is where East Timor becomes an Indonesian province with special autonomy rights. Under Indonesia's highly centralized, repressive administration, this would be meaningless. Fretilin has made it very clear that if the UN succeeds in transforming current negotiations into a bilateral issue between Portugal and Indonesia, it will not abide by any decision; unless an agreement includes the East Timorese and respects the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 15.14 and 15.41, the fighting will continue.

The prospects, frankly, look bleak. The prohibitive costs of conquering East Timor may weaken Indonesia's capacities in other areas where potential or actual separatist movements find support. Every bit of foreign military assistance helps to balance the account. Yet no matter how great the flow of military hardware, significant instability would jeopardize continued investment in Indonesia. Given the hollowness of concern for human rights expressed in the UN, this may be the one and only hope for the East Timorese. The only valuable help these people have received has come from former Portuguese African colonies, and from a few non-governmental organizations and concerned individuals. Solidarity groups in Portugal, Australia, the Netherlands, US and UN have helped to keep the issue alive. But meanwhile the Maubere land is destroyed, their leaders killed and population decimated, and the difficult tasks of reconstruction under a free and independent state ever recede from the horizon.